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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger study examining Canadian and American students' attitudes toward schoolwork, this investigation examined the relationship between Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their gender, socioeconomic status, age, school achievement, and school attainment value (the importance they placed on doing well in school). The study also examined the relationship between students' attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Subjects were 122 Chinese-Canadian fourth- through seventh-grade students in a Roman Catholic school in Vancouver, British Columbia. The students completed a questionnaire that measured their attitudes toward schoolwork and perception of parental behaviors supporting schoolwork. Analysis showed that age was the most useful variable for predicting Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their perceptions of parental behaviors. School attainment value and perceived parental valuing and concern for schoolwork were also useful in predicting students' attitudes toward schoolwork. (MM)

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Chinese-Canadian Children's Attitudes Toward Schoolwork and Perception of Parental Behaviors That Support Schoolwork

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Abstract

The relationship between Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their gender, SES, age, school achievement and school attainment value and the relationship between their attitudes toward schoolwork and perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork were examined. Factor analysis and stepwise multiple regression analysis of questionnaire data from 122 4th- through 7th-grade students showed that age was the single most useful variable for predicting Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. School attainment value and perceived parental valuing and concern for schoolwork were also useful in predicting their attitudes toward schoolwork. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Chinese-Canadian Children's Attitudes Toward Schoolwork and Perception of Parental Behaviors That Support Schoolwork

As part of the efforts to better understand and promote multiculturalism in Canada, studies have been conducted to examine various facets of life among Chinese-Canadians (Leung & Foster, 1985). Since Chinese-Canadian children constitutes a significant portion of the Chinese-Canadian population, studies on Chinese-Canadian children contribute to a better understanding of cultural diversity and have important educational implications. A review of the literature shows a paucity of research on Chinese-Canadian children, and this study is an attempt to address this gap. It was hoped that the findings of this study could enhance understanding of school-related behaviors of Chinese-Canadian children among teachers, school counselors, parents, childcare workers and other interested individuals.

Researchers (e.g., Tsui, 1979) noted that Chinese-Canadian youngsers tend to present few problems with schoolwork or discipline in the classroom. Consistent with this finding, Leung and Foster (1985) showed that Chinese-Canadian children showed more positive attitudes toward teachers and learning than their non-Chinese Canadian peers. These studies tend to focus on classroom behaviors and on cross-group comparisons. In order to extend our understanding of Chinese-Canadian children beyond the classroom or comparative settings, an attempt was made in

this study to determine if Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork were related to several individual difference variables. Specifically, this study was an attempt to deteremine the relationship between Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their gender, socioeconomic status (SES), age, school achievement, and school attainment value, that is, children's feelings about the importance of doing well in school (see, e.g., Mussen, Conger, Kagan, & Huston, 1990).

Additionally, the relationship between Chinese-Canadian children's perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork and the five predictor variables noted above was examined in this study. Chinese-Canadian children's perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork was examined because it is parental behaviors as perceived by children that help determine exactly what it is that children adopt and internalize as their own to guide their future behaviors, thus becoming their own socialization agents (cf. Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1979). The emphasis here is on children's perception of parental behaviors and their underlying values that they might adopt and internalize to help shape their attitudes toward schoolwork.

School attainment value was used as a predictor variable in this study because one might expect that one's values affect one's attitudes and behaviors (see, e.g., Santrock, 1987) and would be related to one's child-rearing experiences at home. Similarly, one might expect that

Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork would be related to their school achievement, which, in turn, would be related to parental encouragement and support. Gender was used as a predictor variable because research (see, e.g., Mussen, Conger, Kagan, & Huston, 1990) demonstrated that throughout the school years, particularly in the elementary and high school years, girls tend to outperform boys academically. It would, therefore, be of interest to examine if Chinese-Canadian girls have more positive attitudes toward schoolwork and have more positive perceptions of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Age was used as a predictor variable because prior research with other populations indicated that as students became older, their attitudes toward school and learning became less positive (Buxton, 1973; Chen & Stevenson, 1989). SES was used as a predictor variable because it was noted (see, e.g., Slavin, 1991) that children of higher SES tend to achieve higher in school and receive greater parental support for school achievement than students of lower SES. Because of these considerations, it was therefore hypothesized that gender, age, SES, school attainment value, and school achievement of Chinese-Canadian children would be related to their attitudes toward schoolwork and to their perceptions of parental behaviors that support schoolwork.

Even though studies have shown that parental behaviors are related to children's school achievement (see, e.g., Hess & Holloway, 1984), little research has been reported

concerning the relationship between children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Since attitudes tend to influence behaviors (Cooper & Croyle, 1984), research on attitudes promotes the understanding of behaviors. Accordingly, a second purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Given that parents are children's primary agents of socialization (see, e.g., Hetherington & Parke, 1986), it was hypothesized that Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork would be related to their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork.

Method

Participants. The participants in this study were 122 students equally divided between the two genders from the 4th- through 7th-grade classes in one Roman Catholic school in Vancouver, British Columbia. The students in this school were practically entirely Chinese. In the sample, there were 29, 28, 30, and 35 students in the 4th-, 5th-, 6th-, and 7th-grade, respectively. These 122 students were part of a total of 433 Roman Catholic elementary school students from Canada and the U.S. who took part in a larger study on children's attitudes toward schoolwork. The reason why 4th- through 7th-grade students were chosen for study is that they had been in school for some time and were old enough to

understand and respond to the tasks required of them. Roman Catholic school students were recruited for the study because they tend to be a neglected population in research.

Materials. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of Likert-type items (e.g., I like doing homework, My parents are interested in what I am learning in school) measuring children's attitudes toward schoolwork and perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. The questionnaire also included demographic questions asking participants to indicate their gender, grade level in school, birthday, and the highest level of schooling completed by their fathers and mothers (or guardians). The average of the reported father's and mothers's education was used to measure children's SES. The participants were also asked to indicate how important it was for them to do well in school using a scale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important) and also how well they were doing in school using a scale from 1 (very poorly) to 7 (very well). These last two questions were used to measure children's school attainment value and school achievement (see, e.g., Ames & Archer, 1988), respectively.

Procedure. The study was conducted in the participants' classrooms. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously by the investigator, who was unknown to them. They were told that there were no right or wrong answers and the best answer was the one that honestly and accurately reflected how they felt. (All statements were

read to the 4th-graders since they were younger and might have difficulty with the statements if left to themselves).

Results

The data from all 433 participants in the study were first analyzed using factor analysis. Seven scales with acceptable reliability emerged (Cronbach's alphas for the present sample of 122 subjects ranged from .69 to .94). These seven scales were subsequently used as dependent variables. Four of these seven scales were concerned with perceived parental behaviors that support schoolwork and the other three with students' attitudes toward schoolwork. The number of items comprising each scale ranged from five to 12. These seven scales and their intercorrelations are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

As can be seen from Table 1, the correlations among these seven scales ranged from a low of -.02 to a high of .62, with the great majority of them in the relatively low range. These findings thus suggest that these scales were relatively independent measures in and of themselves.

With regard to the intercorrelations among the predictor variables (school attainment value, school achievement, gender, age, and SES), the correlations were small, ranging from -.06 to .22, and they hence will not be discussed further.

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were subsequently performed using the seven scales mentioned above as dependent measures and the five variables noted above as predictors. The results are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

With regard to children's attitudes toward schoolwork, Table 2 shows that age correlated negatively with all three measures of children's attitudes toward schoolwork (homework is important and useful, liking homework and school, sense of responsibility for homework and learning). School attainment value was found to correlate positively with two measures of children's attitudes toward schoolwork (homework is important and useful, liking homework and school), while school achievement was found to correlate positively with one measure of children's attitudes toward schoolwork (sense of responsibility for homework and learning).

With regard to children's perceived parental behaviors that support schoolwork, Table 2 shows that age correlated negatively with three measures (parental concern for schoolwork, parental valuing of schoolwork, and parental feeling about good school performance) and it correlated positively with "parental feeling about unacceptable school behaviors". School attainment value was found to correlate positively with "parental valuing of schoolwork." School

achievement was found to correlate positively with "parental feeling about good school performance."

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were also performed using the three scales measuring students' attitudes toward schoolwork as dependent variables and the four scales measuring children's perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork as predictors. The results are shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

As can be seen from Table 3, perceived "parental concern for schoolwork" and "parental valuing of schoolwork" were found to correlate positively with two scales measuring children's attitudes toward schoolwork (homework is important and useful, sense of responsibility for homework and learning). Perceived "parental concern for schoolwork" was found to correlate positively with "liking homework and school."

Discussion

With regard to students' attitudes toward schoolwork, Table 2 shows that school attainment value correlated positively with the scale measuring homework is important and useful and also with the scale measuring liking homework and school. The educational implication of this finding seems to be that to help students develop positive attitudes toward schoolwork, one needs to help them develop a strong

school attainment value. As can be seen from Table 2, school attainment value correlated positively with perceived "parental valuing of schoolwork." This suggests that to help children develop a strong school attainment value, it is important that parents show their children that they value schoolwork. In this way, one might hope that they will help their children develop positive attitudes toward schoolwork.

The data in Table 2 also showed that as children became older, their attitudes toward schoolwork became poorer. This finding agrees with those of Buxton (1973) and Chen and Stevenson (1989). These researchers found that as students became older, their attitudes toward school and homework became poorer. The exact reasons for this negative relationship between age and attitudes toward schoolwork are not immediately clear. One might speculate, however, that this negative relationship may be due to the perceived decreasing parental involvement with their schoolwork as children became older. As can be seen from Table 2, as children became older, they perceived their parents to become less concerned about their schoolwork, valuing less of their schoolwork and perceived less parental feeling about good school performance but more parental feeling about unnacceptable school behaviors. These findings thus suggest that it is important for Chinese-Canadian parents to continue to show their children that they value and are concerned about their schoolwork as their children become older. Chinese-Canadian parents also need to continue to

show their children that they feel positively about good school performance and feel negatively about unacceptable school behaviors as children get older in their effort to promote positive attitudes toward schoolwork. This latter idea may be especially important for Chinese-Canadian parents to keep in mind as, traditionally, Chinese parents often use withholding praise as a means of teaching a child humility (Jensen, 1985).

The finding that the higher the children's school achievement, the stronger their "sense of responsibilility for homework and learning" and the greater their perceived "parental feeling about good school performance" is not unexpected. One may expect that children's sense of responsibilility for homework and learning and parental feeling about good school performance both contribute to school achievement, which, in turn, might reinforce children's sense of responsibilility for homework and learning and parental feeling about good school performance.

With regard to the relationship between children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork, Table 3 shows that perceived "parental concern for schoolwork" and perceived "parental valuing of schoolwork" both correlated positively with "homework is important and useful" and with a "sense of responsibility for homework and learning" while perceived "parental concern for schoolwork" correlated with "liking homework and school." These findings thus suggest that

parental valuing and concern for schoolwork are important for the development of positive attitudes toward schoolwork among children. Moreover, the fact that both perceived "parental valuing of schoolwork" and perceived "parental concern for schoolwork" were found to correlate positively with two of the three measures of children's attitudes toward schoolwork indicates that each measure is a significant contributor to children's attitudes toward schoolwork above and beyond that of the other.

It should be noted that gender and SES were not found to have any significant effects in this study. This finding is understandable in view of the fact that Chinese-Canadian parents had to pay tuition fees in order for their children to receive a Catholic education. This willingness to pay extra for the education of their children may suggest that their concern for the quality of education for their children overrides sex and SES considerations, and this is reflected in their children's attitudes and perceptions of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Perhaps further study may help clarify this conjecture.

In conclusion, the present study found that Chinese-Canadian children's school attainment value correlated significantly with their attitudes toward schoolwork. Age was found to be the single most useful variable for predicting Chinese-Canadian children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. This is the case because it was found to

predict all three measures of children's attitudes toward schoolwork and all four measures of their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Specifically, it was found that as Chinese-Canadian children became older, they felt homework is less important and useful, liking homework and school less, showed a weaker sense of responsibility for homework and learning, and they perceived their parents to value schoolwork less, were less concerned about their schoolwork, showed less positive feeling about good school performance, but showed more negative feeling about unacceptale school behaviors. The implication of these findings is that it is important for Chinese-Canadian parents to help their children develop a strong school attainment value and to continue to show their children that they value and are concerned about their schoolwork as their children become older. Chinese-Canadian parents also need to continue to show their children that they feel positively about good school performance and feel negatively about unacceptable school behaviors as their children get older in their effort to promote positive attitudes toward schoolwork. Finally, since the present study focused on parental behaviors as perceived by students rather than as reported by parents, a second conclusion from this study is that it is important for Chinese-Canadian parents to ensure that their children perceive their values, feelings, and concern for schoolwork in their effort to promote children's attitudes toward schoolwork.

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Table 1

Zero-Order Intercorrelations Among Seven Measures (N=122)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	---	.44***	-.12	.25**	.42***	.26**	.46***
2		---	-.17*	.28***	.41***	.17*	.37***
3			---	-.56***	-.08	-.02	-.06
4				---	-.09	.13	.14
5					---	.56***	.62***
6						---	.43***
7							---

Note.
1. Perceived parental concern for schoolwork (e.g., My parents are interested in what I am learning at school).
2. Perceived parental valuing of schoolwork (e.g., My parents feel school is important for me).
3. Perceived parental feeling about unacceptable school behaviors (e.g., My parents feel bad if I misbehave in school).
4. Perceived parental feeling about good school performance (e.g., My parents feel good if I work very hard in school).
5. Homework is important and useful (e.g., Homework helps me to learn).
6. Liking homework and school (e.g., I like doing homework).
7. Sense of responsibility for homework and learning (e.g., It is my job to finish my homework).

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 2

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Students' Responses to Seven Scales

Scale	Predictor(s)	R/Beta	Increment in R Sq.
Students' Attitudes			
Homework is important and useful	S.A.Value	.32***/.32	.10***
	Age	.42***/-.27	.07**
Liking homework & school	S.A.Value	.25*/.25	.06**
	Age	.32**/-.21	.04*
Sense of responsibility for homework & learning	Age	.27**/-.27	.07**
	Achieve.	.36***/.24	.06**
Perceived Parental Behaviors			
Parental concern for schoolwork	Age	.30**/-.30	.09**
Parental valuing of schoolwork	S.A.Value[a]	.28**/.28	.08**
	Age	.35**/-.21	.04*
Parental feeling about unacceptable school behaviors	Age	.31**/.31	.10**
Parental feeling about good school performance	Age	.37***/-.37	.14***
	Achieve.[b]	.45***/.25	.06**

Note:
a: S.A.Value=School Attainment Value.
b: Achieve.=School achievement.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 3

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Students' Responses to Three Scales

Scale	Predictor(s)	R/Beta	Increment in R Sq.
Homework is important and useful	Parental concern for schoolwork	.42***/.30	.18***
	Parental valuing of schoolwork	.49***/.28	.06**
Liking homework & school	Parental concern for schoolwork	.26**/.26	.07**
Sense of responsibility for homework & learning	Parental concern for schoolwork	.46***/.37	.22***
	Parental valuing of schoolwork	.50***/.21	.03*

Note:
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.